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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN HOUSING AND ECONOMIC
ISSUES

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: On December 1, Charge d'Affaires met with Talmas movement leader Aynur Kurmanov. Kurmanov discussed the impact of the current financial crisis and the creation of a "new poor class" from members of the middle class. Kurmanov predicted that, given the change in their standard of living, certain members of the Kazakhstani middle class will become more politically active and join protest groups. When asked about differences in policy between the government and opposition political parties, Kurmanov stated there were no policy or platform differences. At one point during the meeting, Kurmanov commented, "We do not have political parties in Kazakhstan, just social movements." END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Although relatively young, Kurmanov is very active in grass-roots social movements and the Communist Party. In 2003, he was elected chairman of the Molodaya Gvardiya youth movement and was an activist with the Solidarnost labor movement and independent trade union at Uralsk's Metallist plant until 2004. After numerous arrests, Kurmanov left Uralsk in 2004, and resettled in Almaty, where he continued to work with the Solidarnost movement. In 2006, Kurmanov founded the Socialist Resistance movement and erler thsy, he ette aa Qcy. He claimed the government is gradually "nationalizing" the private sector and using the current economic crisis as an excuse to redistribute the assets of banks. Kurmanov quoted a Kazakhstani economist who called the government "corrupt" for buying 25 per cent of shares in four leading banks and said he doubts the money set aside to solve the crisis will be used properly. Kurmanov commented that one potential result of the government's actions will be the creation of mega-banks, (NOTE: which is also happening in the United States. END NOTE.)

¶6. (SBU) Kurmanov reported that the current Memorandum of Understanding between the government and mining companies to prevent mass layoffs will expire on January 1, 2009. He said that more than 30,000 mining workers are currently on leave from mining companies in the country, including 5pz], Qanov told the Charge that on November 30, Yermukhamet Yertysbayev, currently an advisor to President Nazarbayev and previouslylqf:9 said that "in times of crisis, the opposition and government should be one." Kurmanov said he thought Yertysbayev's speech was an attempt to discover the

opposition's plans prior to the next elections. (NOTE: While rumors of early elections continue, President Nazarbayev recently stated that the next elections will be held on schedule, in 2012. END NOTE.)

18. (SBU) When asked about the opposition's policy points, Kurmanov answered dismissively, saying the political opposition in Kazakhstan

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is weak. He said that while the government might find a way to bring some opposition representatives into parliament, this will only be done "for the good of the West and OSCE." Kurmanov argued that opposition in Kazakhstan is expressed through social problems, not political beliefs. Kurmanov said the Leave the Houses to the People movement has become one of the most active groups during the economic crisis. He suggested this movement could inspire the formation of new trade unions and the development of other grass roots movements against unemployment and pension problems.

19. (SBU) NOTE: Daulet Zhumabekov, leader of the BOMZh movement, was also expected to attend the December 1 meeting with the Charge. BOMZh, a Russian acronym for those without an official place of residence, is a movement of retired military personnel fighting to receive free housing promised by the Ministry of Defense. Under Kazakhstani law, retired officers with 25 years of service are entitled to free apartments. Several officers won a lawsuit against the Ministry of Defense for its failure to fulfill the housing obligation; but to date, none of the officers has received housing. On November 30, Zhumanbekov performed a unique protest act, climbing to the top of a construction crane in Almaty and refusing to come down for 11 hours. Zhumabekov subsequently said his group's claims had not been satisfied, although Ministry of Defense (MOD) officials promised to re-examine them. A few hours before the meeting at the Embassy Branch Office, post was informed that Zhumanbekov had traveled to Astana to meet with MOD officials. END NOTE.

110. (SBU) COMMENT: Post has fruitlessly looked to find an opposition party with a defined policy platform. The opposition political parties are organized around personalities, largely those who previously served in the government but subsequently split with Nazarbayev. The "social movements" do have policy platforms, but are generally restricted to a single issue. Nonetheless, these movements have had some limited success in changing government policy and may represent a first step toward a uniquely Kazakhstani path to exerting the people's will. After all, historically in the United States, all great social movements have led to political results and enhanced democracy. END COMMENT.

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